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SUBJECT: SANAA MEDIA REACTION -- GENERAL ABIZAID VISIT,
SOLIDARITY WITH AL JAZEERA, MEHLIS REPORT, JMP REFORM
INITIATIVE, ET AL.

Following paragraphs cover November 22 - 29

1. ABIZAID VISIT: Yemeni newspapers gave above-the-fold coverage to the two-day visit of Commander-in-Chief General John Abizaid of U.S. Central Command to Yemen. Al-Thawra (official government daily) reported that General Abizaid and President Saleh discussed bilateral cooperation in security and counterterrorism.

2. AL-JAZEERA REPORT: Local media reported on several demonstrations staged in solidarity with Al-Jazeera following an unsubstantiated report in the UK's Daily Mirror that President Bush had proposed the bombing of Al-Jazeera's Doha headquarters. On November 25, Al-Sahwa (Islah Party weekly) reported that the Joint Meeting Party (coalition of opposition parties) issued a statement in solidarity and requested a UN probe. On November 27, NewsYemen.net (independent news site) reported that the Yemeni Journalists' Syndicate also staged a sit-in in support of Al-Jazeera. On November 29, Al-Sahwa quoted Nasser Taha Mustafa, Chairman of the official Saba News Agency that "the U.S. silence about the report is a clear indication of its authenticity."

3. PRESS FREEDOM: On November 21, Almotamar.net (website of ruling GPC party) reported a demand by the Yemeni Journalists' Syndicate that the press law providing for imprisonment of journalists should be abolished. On November 23, journalist Hafez Al-Bokari, YJS Secretary-General, resigned his syndicate post. In a statement which Al-Bokari sent to media contacts and to post, he described the YJS as "paralyzed" and under attack both from outside forces and from internal pressures imposed by YJS board members close to the government. On November 28, the Yemen Times reported that a Sana'a court banned the newspaper Attajamu' (weekly, affiliated with the Unionist Congregation Party) from publication for six months for publishing reports "ridiculing Islam and touching on public security" and banned two journalists connected with the paper from publishing any articles for one year. [Note: The article which generated the verdict was an August 2005 retrospective regarding street fighting in 1968 between royalist supporters and Sha'afi militants. End note.]

4. SWISS TOURISTS: On November 21, most press sources reported the kidnapping of two Swiss tourists near Marib. The kidnapper reportedly expressed no political demands, but asked only for the release of his imprisoned brother. On November 22, the two tourists were released and returned to Sanaa.

7. CHILD LABOR: On November 28, the Yemen Observer (English-language weekly; publisher is President Saleh's personal media advisor) carried news of a Ministry of Labor report estimating the number of child laborers at 500,000. Other media sources over the past week estimated the figure at 400,000.

5. HUNT OIL ARBITRATION PROCEEDINGS: On November 22, Raynews (website of liberal opposition Rabita Party) carried straight reporting about Hunt Oil's decision to resort to arbitration with the International Chamber of Commerce in Paris against the government of Yemen for remuneration over the allegedly illegal expropriation of an oil production block operated by Hunt since 1982.

6. MEHLIS REPORT: Press commentary on the Mehliis Report has been uniformly supportive of Syria and critical of the United States. On November 27, however, Al-Thawra quoted FM Al-Qirbi that Yemen "welcomes the agreement" between Syria and Mehliis to interrogate Syrian officials in Vienna.

7. JMP REFORM INITIATIVE: On November 27, most opposition media sources and some (though not all) official sources reported on the Joint Meeting Parties (coalition of

opposition parties) announcement of a political reform initiative aimed at peaceful steps, without outside assistance, to arrest the "deteriorating political, social, and economic climate" in Yemen. The JMP initiative elicited a swift reaction from the government. According to Al-Sahwa.net (Islah Party news site) Sultan Al-Barakani, head of the GPC parliamentary bloc, demanded from the floor of Parliament the formation of a committee to investigate the initiative and branded it "an incitement" against the country and accused the JMP of "treason" and of "throwing themselves into the arms of foreign powers." A commentary by the editor-in-chief of Al-Motamar.net (GPC website) criticized the initiative as "unconstitutional, traitorous and separatist." Mohammed al-Yadoumi, Secretary-General of the Islah party, accused the government of attempting to undermine any initiative for reform and called an open dialogue.

KHOURY